

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Suzanne Bonamici
Joint Subcommittee on Environment and Energy Hearing
“EPA Power Plant Regulations: Is the Technology Ready?”
October 29, 2013, 10:00am

Thank you Chair Stewart and Chair Lummis, for holding this hearing today. And, to our panel of witnesses, welcome to the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology.

I join those who are very pleased by the proposal from the Administration and the United States Environmental Protection Agency to take the first steps to set carbon emission limits for all future natural gas and coal power plants. We have known for some time that dangerously high levels of carbon dioxide pollution are altering our planet’s climate system. According to the latest statistics compiled by the EPA, American power plants released more than 2.4 billion tons of carbon dioxide into the environment in 2011. Fossil fuel power plants are responsible for a majority of these emissions, and coal-fired power plants emit more carbon dioxide than any other source.

Last month, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released the global comprehensive scientific assessment confirming that it is “*extremely likely* that human influence has been the dominant cause of the observed warming since the mid-20th century.” The report also confirmed that carbon dioxide increases are primarily the result of fossil fuel emissions, and have increased by 40 percent since the pre-industrial period. Addressing the effects of carbon pollution globally will require an international effort, but the United States can and must be a leader and set an example for other nations by reducing our own carbon pollution at home.

We must do a better job of preventing the harmful effects of carbon dioxide emissions produced by natural gas and coal-fired power plants. The coal industry’s claim that the new carbon rule will kill jobs and bring down our recovering economy are scare tactics that have no basis in reality. The EPA proposal will not apply to existing power plants. The new rule will only apply to new coal-fired power plants that will be built in the future.

As we look forward to the EPA issuing the new carbon emissions standard, it is worth reminding ourselves of what we get out of these standards: better air quality, which means better health for us, for our children, and for our grandchildren. In the four decades since it was signed, the Clean Air Act has saved thousands of lives and helped to fuel job growth.

Additionally the passage of the Clean Air Act led to important advancements in technology. Environmental protection technology industries created innovations like catalytic converters, and sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide control technology. When the EPA took steps to require the application of these technologies, the industry made claims against those rules similar to the contentions that the coal industry is using today to undermine the carbon emission standard for new fossil fuel power plants: that our economy would be weakened and the industry would be devastated. As we know, that never came to fruition. Those industries adjusted and incorporated the technologies into their operations and went on to become more profitable than they had ever been. And, we got cleaner air and healthier children.

The future of our planet and our environment depends on us making smart investments in innovative environmental protection technologies and reducing the amount of greenhouse gases we emit into our environment. The new EPA rule under the Clean Air Act will incentivize the development of these new technologies that will in turn result in a safer, more secure, and less carbon dependent energy future.